

RECENT NOVELS.

LATEST ENGLISH AND AMERICAN WORKS

BONS AND DAUGHTERS. By the Author of "The Story of Margaret Kent." 12mo, pp. 473. Boston: Houghtaling & Co.

DOCTOR CUPID. By Rhoda Broughton. 16mo, pp. 403. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company.

CASHEL BYRON'S PROFESSION. By George Birrell Shaw. 16mo, pp. 163. Harper & Brothers.

"Sons and Daughters" is an excellent piece of work. It is a novel emphatically of the period, redolent of the modern spirit, presenting lightly and interestingly several of the problems of the hour. The author does not have recourse to changes of scene or surprises in action. The story is worked out altogether in one suburb of Philadelphia. There is not a sensational incident from beginning to end. Neither is there any of that overwrought psychologic analysis or pseudodiagnosis which is affected by the introspective school. The story is most captivating and is admirably told, with a simplicity and straightforwardness altogether satisfactory.

Being a story of sons and daughters it is largely one of love affairs, and though there are plenty of them they do not become tiresome. The central figure, Miriam Reese, is decidedly original. The only daughter of a vulgar millionaire who married a poor man and refuses to give him any control of her money, this girl, possessing many sterling qualities, is in danger of spoiling her life by the exercise of an incessant suspicion directed toward the motives of those who seek her hand. She has had only too much reason for doubting the sincerity of her admirers and for imputing their homage to her wealth rather than to herself.

At length a lover comes who is not merely—though even Paul Forbes is moved somewhat by her possessions. Still at first he honestly believes himself to be drawn by the girl herself, and she is too responsive not to desire that her mistrust should be groundless. She has, however, practised this kind of inquisition too long to forego it now, and since Paul is really fascinated rather than enamored the situation becomes strained. Then there is Polly Chichester, a lovely girl who keeps house for the rector, her father, and who unconsciously interferes between Paul and Miriam. The scenes between Miriam and Polly are capitally written, though perhaps they tend to create the impression that whoever married the former would have a sufficiently eventful career assured to him. The daughters of Redmond the banker, exuberant beauties who expend their energies on physical science, spiritualism and the mind, are delightful creations, especially Lorraine, who has made up her mind to be a college professor, but whose scientific career is cruelly cut short by Bertie Jasper. The Shakespeare Club, which meets at Mr. Reese's to correct the text of "Hamlet," is described with much quiet and keen humor and not a little sarcasm, directed against a prevalent literary foible. The dialogue is remarkably bright, natural and pointed. The characters are thoroughly distinguished and as thoroughly harmonized. Though so many of the young people are examples of that peculiar modern laissez-aller system of education which is apt to produce such astonishing results, the freakishness and irregularity of their development in no way detracts from the symmetry of their personalities, and this is a proof of high artistic skill. There is but one doubtful episode in the book and that is the final act of Miriam. It would be too much to say that what she does is unnatural, the possibilities in such a case are so illimitable. But somehow her marriage, coupled with the intimation that she found happiness in it, seems inconsistent with the theory of the genuineness of her original feeling for Paul, and if she is acquitted of caprice it can only be at some sacrifice of her delicacy of sentiment. Yet it must be always so hard to say what a girl like Miriam would do that any insistence upon such a point is open to the objection of hypercriticism. The story is so thoroughly good, too, that it deserves the hearty commendation, and not the least pleasant thing about it is the geniality and sunniness of its tone. Evidently the author of "The Story of Margaret Kent" is no pessimist.

There is a perversity about some of Rhoda Broughton's conceptions which inclines us to quarrel with her art. She leans too much to the French lines in fiction, and now and then seems to be contesting with Ouida the palm of naughtiness. "Doctor Cupid" is incontestably a clever novel, even a brilliant one, but it does not leave an altogether pleasant taste in the mouth. The hero is one of the deep-minded, irascible young men who are so rare outside of modern romances, but why was it necessary to complicate and deteriorate his character by presenting him as the "cavaliere seruante" of a married Lady Betty? This Lady Betty is herself a creature like of whom it may be sincerely hoped does not exist in England or elsewhere. She is the fast woman of the period magnified a thousand diameters, and her coarseness, vulgarity, indecency and general impudence are so strongly emphasized as to make the rehabilitation of John Talbot, her quondam lover and follower, too difficult. To overcome this the author gives Talbot a number of good qualities, but only with the effect of demonstrating that a man so highly endowed could never have fallen to the degraded position he occupies when first introduced. In short it is clear that either he was too good for Lady Betty or not good enough for Margaret. His relation to the first also makes it scarcely credible that the second would have consented to know him, and the comparative facility with which he acquires her friendship—to say the least—is really an imputation upon a character which Rhoda Broughton evidently meant to be ideally lofty and pure. The truth no doubt is that this author has unconsciously suffered her ethical standard to sink, so that at last her highest conception has become only of secondary excellence. There are two love stories in the book, that of Prue and Freddy Duncan being more sad yet more natural than the other. Freddy Duncan, a cultured, gentle, utterly selfish yet sentimental young man, abstractly full of high feelings and concretely destitute of principle, is a cleverly worked-out character. Prue, his victim, is in her way scarcely less selfish, being Margaret's adored and spoiled sister. She is not indeed a very lovely little person, and even the tragedy of her fate cannot blind us to the obvious fact that she never could have been of much use in the world, and that even the heartless Freddy Duncan would have been terribly punished if she had lived and had married her. Margaret is by far the pleasantest and wholesomest person in the story; in fact, too good for so a battered and damaged a character as John Talbot.

There is something decidedly out of the common run in Mr. Shaw's novel. A young heiress, left an orphan by the death of a peculiar, eccentric and literary father, enters life haunted by the fear of being sought for her fortune. She is an unconventional young person, and though described as possessing great personal attractions, the author represents her as having golden hair and green eyes; a kind of beauty unfortunately recalling the malevolent charms of Becky Sharp. Lydia Carew, the said heroine, is as variously accomplished as "Tennyson's 'Princess.' She has taken all knowledge for her province, and her father has taught her to despise religion and to scoff at modern civilization with a profound conviction of the truth of his agnostic and pessimistic positions. In spite of her abnormal learning she is shrewd and sensible, and she looks forward in a businesslike way to the contingencies of the future. She realized that if she marries it would not be wise to unite herself with a man possessing the same kind of attributes, a man of science or letters, for instance. Presently chance throws across her path a youth whose magnificent physical beauty and symmetrical form are reminiscent of classicism. For a long time the occupation of this fine young man is a mystery. He tells her that he is a professor, and though his language is sometimes queer and his mind does not seem very full, Lydia thinks she sees in him an advanced thinker who has perhaps got a little ahead of his time. Cashel Byron's profession, however, proves to be that of a prize-fighter. Of course it would not have done to represent him as a vulgar "slugger." He is a slip of gentility run wild and fallen into the prize ring, where he has developed such gowess that the championing of England

and Australia has fallen into his hands. He is indeed rather an anomalous personage, shifting somewhat bewilderingly from sheer ruffianism to a rude sort of chivalry, but he is perhaps all the more interesting because of his inconsistencies and unconventional ways. It is plain that only an heiress of Lydia Carew's exceptional training could ever have come into contact with such a problem. But so original a plot deserved as well as demanded some concessions and compromises, and it must be said that fiction has of late offered few odder or more amusing performances than the description of the processes by which Cashel Byron becomes the husband of Lydia Carew. It is an original idea cleverly and boldly executed, and considering the difficulties inherent in the task, with decided verisimilitude.

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